

*interestingly. Probably  
too much plot summary*

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movie review: "Crimes and Misdemeanors" (Orion Pictures)

*What a surprise!* Woody Allen has given us an unabashed bit of Jewish Americana in "Crimes and Misdemeanors." Not exactly a black comedy or a serious drama, this film is more a parable about the crises of conscience that two men face in separate decisions they must make.

Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau), a successful New York ophthalmologist, is tormented by thought that his whole life is going up in smoke. The woman he's been having a two-year affair with insists that he tell his wife about his indiscretion, hinting that she'll reveal more than just his sexual impropriety if he doesn't cooperate (he "moved funds around" when his business looked like it might fail). When her calls become more frequent and more desperate, he stands at the edge of a nervous breakdown.

He confides in one of his patients, a rabbi whom he has known for year and who is quickly going blind. The rabbi suggests that Judah confess to his wife, that their years of marriage will see them ~~to~~ through. But Judah doesn't believe his wife will be able <sup>to</sup> endure the social embarrassment. He turns <sup>to</sup> brother, the black sheep of the family, who suggests that if the woman he's having an affair with won't listen to reason then he should threaten her. More bluntly, the brother suggests getting her out of the way. Judah can't believe that he's considering going from a messing case of infidelity to murder.

If the ~~Powers-That-Be~~ were forcing Judah into a life and death decision they were giggling behind the back of Clifford Stern (Woody Allen). Clifford is a documentary filmmaker whose only award-winning venture was an honorable mention at a convention where all in attendance were given honorable mention awards. Having a hugely successful Hollywood TV producer for a brother-in-law and sexually unresponsive wife only add to Cliff's mini-Job-like existence.

Cliff's only respite from his "wilderness experience" are the afternoons that he spends watching old films with his niece. But then he seems to find an oasis for his soul when he meets Halley Reed (Mia Farrow) while working on a TV documentary about his self-important brother-in-law. It only seem fitting, in a Woody Allen film, that while Clifford is falling in love with Halley that he

LOOK UP WORDS  
you can't spell

must compete with his brother-in-law for her attention. For the most part Halley seems to share Cliff's love for old movies and disdain for his brother-in-law, but then one must remember what kind of havoc the Powers-That-Be can wreak.

Running throughout the movie are little film clips of an obscure Jewish philosopher, Professor Levy (Martin Bergmann), talking about the impossibility of love, how we expect far too much from those we love, but that in the end love is the only thing worth living for. The film clips are a part a documentary that Clifford's been developing that no one is interested in using.

Also running through the movie are remembrances on the part of Judah of his traditional Jewish upbringing and the picture of his father lecturing him about the eyes of God always being on him.

These two themes punctuate the crises of belief that these characters must face: for Clifford it's the belief in love and for Judah whether God is really watching him.

As with most Woody Allen films, this is an ensemble piece. Martin Landau is brilliant as the man watching his whole world slowly unravel. Mia Farrow is mysterious and vulnerable and driven. Anjelica Huston as Judah's lover, is beautiful and dangerously explosive. Alan Alda as Clifford's brother-in-law, Lester, is pompous and obnoxious. It's refreshing to see Alda in a non-Phil Donohue role for once. The finished documentary that Clifford puts together of Lester, interspersing Lester pontificating with clips of Benito Mussolini, is hilarious.

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Toward the end of the film Judah and Clifford have a chat and remind the audience that Reality is nothing like the movies. They must have been thinking of other movies because Allen and company have again given us another slice of refreshing realism.